

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0046
(916) 319-2046
FAX (916) 319-2146

DISTRICT OFFICE
6150 VAN NUYS BOULEVARD, SUITE 300
VAN NUYS, CA 91401
(818) 376-4246
FAX (818) 376-4252

Assembly California Legislature



ADRIN NAZARIAN
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, FORTY-SIXTH DISTRICT

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STATE ADMINISTRATION

JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT COMMITTEE

October 6, 2015

Instructional Quality Commission
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: History-Social Science Framework revised on 10/01/15

Dear History-Social Science SMC Members:

We write to express our disagreement with the draft curriculum framework relating to the Armenian Genocide, which was released on October 1, 2015.

For years, California and other nations have recognized the Armenian Genocide as the first genocide of the modern era and scholars have looked upon it as a prototype for genocides that followed; as such the Armenian Genocide plays a vital role in educating our students about major crimes against humanity. It is imperative that all California students understand the trials and tribulations of genocide survivors and their decedents. Therefore, in this centennial year of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, we strongly urge the members of the History-Social Science SMC and the Instructional Quality Commission to join us in increasing awareness of this under-recognized historical event in California's classrooms by accurately portraying this historical event.

We have reviewed the updated frameworks. We applaud the restoration of the 2005 framework language on the Armenian Genocide and want to express our gratitude to the committee for deleting the questionable phrase, "because of Armenian nationalist aspirations and evidence of collaboration with Russian against the Turkish state" from the framework draft.

Unfortunately, there are serious mischaracterizations and erroneous information in the draft, which we must bring to your attention:

1. Line 620: The phrase, "the Turkish government, *or elements within it*" indicates that it's not clear whether it was the government, or "rogue" individuals or groups within it, who carried out the genocide. What does that mean? That the Ottoman/Turkish government did not actually order the mass deportations and murder of the Armenian population? Scholarship on the Armenian Genocide has left no doubt that the crimes were clearly a government program and we feel the words *or elements within it* should also be deleted.



2. Line 620-621: Saying simply that the government ordered a “mass deportation” gives the false impression that the government’s intent was not to annihilate the Armenian people, but to merely move them, and to reduce the description of that genocide to the overly simplistic and one-dimensional term, “mass deportation,” results in a grossly misleading characterization of this event. The brutal actions taken against the Armenians – arrest and mass murder of hundreds of Armenian leaders at the genocide’s outset; then rape, torture, maiming, starvation, holocausts in desert caves during mass deportations, as well as widespread kidnapping and forced Turkification and Islamization of women and children, and seizure of all personal and community properties, etc –were the acts that made up the Armenian Genocide. “Mass deportation” was one of the means employed to achieve the objective of genocide. In addition, the motivation for this crime must be understood as part of a plan, Pan-Turanism, to eradicate all non-muslim minorities from Turkey, as evidenced by the murder of not only the Armenians, but of hundreds of thousands of Greeks and Assyrians as well.

3. Lines 622-623: The sentence “Ottoman authorities force marched..., an act of genocide...” also gives the false impression that mass deportations were the only mechanism that constituted the Armenian Genocide. As noted earlier, the Armenian Genocide was many-faceted, with all methods, including the death marches geared towards the goal of erasing Armenian civilization and culture.

4. Line 623: The phrase “...cost perhaps one million lives” is dangerously erroneous. The use of “perhaps” suggests that it is unknown if even one million were killed. The one million figure is a gross understatement, with most scholars acknowledging 1.5 million and many scholars using up to 2 million, including those who died in the aftermath, as a result of the genocide.

Approximately three-fourths of the Armenian people living in their historic homelands in modern Turkey were killed, and it is important for students to learn this fact accurately, so that they can put it into context and understand the enormity of the devastation.

Additionally, the draft frameworks are not consistent with Government Code Section 6720, which recognizes the Armenian Genocide as: *“April 24 of each year shall be the “California Day of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide,” and the period beginning on the Sunday before that day through the following Sunday shall be the days of remembrance in this state, and shall annually be so proclaimed by the Governor, in memory of the 1,500,000 victims who were subjected to torture, starvation, and murder, including death marches into the Syrian desert, by the rulers of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the exile of more than 500,000 innocent people during the period from 1915 to 1923, inclusive, and in honor of the survivors of those crimes against humanity.”*

Our preference is that lines 619-633 be modified to read:

In 1915, as the Ottoman Empire collapsed declined, the Turkish government, ~~or elements within it, ordered the mass deportation of Armenians from their homeland in the Caucasus Mountains ,~~

carried out a systematic genocide against the Armenian population that had been living on its historic homeland in what is now eastern Turkey. Ottoman-Turkish authorities force-marched Armenians to the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts, an act of genocide that cost perhaps one million lives; first arrested hundreds of Armenian political and intellectual leaders, sending them to their deaths; Armenian men were conscripted into work camps where they were killed outright or through exhaustion; The remaining Armenians were ordered onto death marches into the Syrian desert, during which they were subjected to rape, torture, mutilation, starvation, holocausts in desert caves, kidnapping and forced Turkification and Islamization.

More than 1.5 million Armenians, more than half of the population was eliminated in this way, virtually all their personal and community properties were seized by the government, and more than 500,000 innocent people were forced into exile during the period from 1915 to 1923. Within the context of human rights and genocide, students should learn of the Ottoman government's planned mass-deportation and systematic annihilation of the Armenian population in 1915. When the war ended in 1918 the Armenian population was reduced by 75% and their historic lands were confiscated by the Turkish government. Historic Armenia is now part of eastern Turkey. The Armenian Genocide that opened the twentieth century would be followed by the Jewish Holocaust as Adolf Hitler stated, "Who today speaks of the extermination of the Armenians," as well as other genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda , and Darfur. Students should also examine the reactions of other governments, including that of the United States, and world opinion during and after the Armenian genocide. Teachers can introduce the history of the Near East Relief organization established by the former U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau. Near East Relief came to the aid of hundreds of thousands of Armenian Genocide survivors through the establishment of orphanages, food and vocational programs, etc. Teachers can also use the example of the first international aid project of the Red Cross, that of helping Armenian Genocide survivors, and the prevalent use of the phrase, "Remember the starving Armenians!" as a means to demonstrate to students the profound effect the Armenian Genocide had on the American public. They should examine the effects of the genocide on the remaining Armenian people, who were deprived of their historic homeland, and the ways in which it became a prototype of subsequent genocides. What were the consequences of World War I for nations, ethnic groups, and people?

History is arguably the most powerful tool for understanding the world around us, and often historical events become increasingly well understood with the passage of time. In 1915, there was no one word that described this ultimate crime against humanity; Raphael Lemkin coined the term "Genocide" twenty years later. 100 years later, we are still fighting for an accurate description of these events. Students and survivors of the Armenian Genocide living in California deserve an appropriate and fair representation of this important part of world history. We strongly urge the frameworks be modified to give an accurate representation of the first genocide of the 20th century.

Sincerely,
Members of the California Legislature

Andy

~~Scott~~

Scott Hag

Carol Sue

Jim Calderon

AD19
AD23

Scott Hui

Thomas Larkin

Chifelds

C. Lavin

Janet Quynh

DFHecley

Full Ladd AD4

Members that have signed on to the letter as listed:

Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian

Assemblymember Katcho Achadjian

Senator Isadore Hall III

Senator Carol Liu

Assemblymember Ian C. Calderon

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